

A HANDBOOK
OF
GREEK LACE MAKING.

SECOND EDITION.

ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.

LONDON:

Printed by

R. BARRETT & SONS, 13, MARK LANE.

1870.



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G R E E K L A C E .

THE art of Lace Making, or rather "Point Lace" Making (so called, though not very correctly), has of late years been growing a favourite one among ladies, and many a beautiful and elaborate imitation of quaint old lace has been the result. But a less fortunate result is, that many magazines, only too glad to recognise and stimulate any new fashion, and always ready to supply an endless number of patterns for the newest styles of work, have undertaken to produce an overwhelming number of most plausible-looking designs, well filled up with drawn stitches. And these patterns, having for the most part a familiar and easy flow of lines—such as flowers and fanciful leaves—at once attract a neat worker, who is thus induced to spend her time and work upon patterns which are sadly at fault after all, and really not worthy of the care and patient perseverance so often bestowed upon them. At the same time it is only fair to add that, under some clever and ingenious fingers, even these otherwise faulty patterns become the foundation for such exquisite work that they assume a character of their own, and are very beautiful, the only pity being that a more worthy design was not at first chosen, upon

which to devote all this ingenuity and neatness, so that the result might have been perfect in its origination as well as in its execution.

There is one great mistake in many of the patterns to be met with in second-rate magazines, and which are looked upon as copied from old designs or laces, but which however any one with an eye for such things would, on a very slight examination, at once recognise and pronounce as merely a very modern *brail pattern*, and as such decidedly unsuitable for a reproduction of those fanciful and grotesque designs which are seen in old laces.

We are in the present day so accustomed to take the assistance afforded us, even in our needlework, by machinery—that *multum in parvo*—that it has become almost unnatural and impossible to refuse the aid thrust upon us, as it were; and we become unwilling to do as our great-grandmothers did before us, that is, to spend TIME rather than money upon our work. Many, therefore, who really enjoy working, and have taste and time enough to produce pretty and even elaborate works, are sadly apt to be satisfied with patterns brought before them without any trouble by their monthly magazines, though these patterns are often designed more on the principle of “quantity not quality,” than with any attempt at originality, or even a praiseworthy copying from old designs. We have no right to quarrel with the more prominent design, nor its result, which leads to an increasing demand for braid, thread, and patterns just “started,” which always tempts young beginners—and certainly teaches them neatness in working; but there is a higher knowledge and skill gained by experience, which soon detects the weakness of the style and brings some criticism to bear upon the designs, and

then it is astonishing how many faults will appear in patterns, which at first we admired greatly.

The quantity of narrow braid, so easily produced by machinery, has led to a very natural habit of suiting the pattern to the braid, instead of following the old, and certainly more laborious method of suiting the braid or work to the pattern decided upon beforehand. Yet surely such a habit must greatly hamper the freedom of the design; for by using a continuous braid one is so tempted to tack down a quantity at once, that should the pattern require the cutting of the braid, it is instantly discarded, and a more flowing one selected. And yet some very beautiful effects are made by joining together with bars oddly shaped, separate pieces of work formed of a flat tape and heavy needlework.

Much of the old lace, which our modern "point lace" aims at imitating, was made of a curious braid or tape differing much in width every here and there, and having also all manner of holes, or rather strange "faults" and irregularities, utterly impossible to be imitated by machinery, yet giving the decided character of self-prompting to the lace; and this peculiarity is quite unattainable where the foundation of any design is formed of a perfectly regular and even braid, though made on a pillow.

It is evident that many of the old braid lace designs were first carefully traced on parchment, and then the braid or tape was woven upon a cushion to follow and suit the pattern; the width at any place being regulated and fixed according to the fancy of the worker, whose individual taste was thus brought to bear on every part of her work, from the earliest stages of it. And, consequently, there were none of those unsightly gatherings and puckerings at sharp corners of the

patterns, but a uniform thickness of texture was preserved throughout. And when these gatherings did occur, it was not considered a very fine and carefully-made piece of work. There are also old laces of which the foundation certainly is a continuous braid, and which appears to have been laid on, and filled up much in the same manner as our own modern braid lace is now worked. But these laces are by no means the most beautiful, nor the most fine and valuable, in so far as neither so much time, care nor ingenuity was needed to produce them.

These remarks apply, of course, merely to flat braid laces, for a variety in the thickness, as well as in the width, of the foundation was sometimes added, and even heavy rolls of work, solidly laid over whalebone, were often used in order to add richness of effect and weight. This is the case with all the superb "Venetian point" laces, which are so wonderfully and thickly adorned in this manner.

Braid, made on a pillow, is indeed now very generally used for lace-work, but it is often made in such a flimsy, loose manner, that it is almost invariably destroyed by the mere fact of the stitches depending upon it, drawing the threads aside, and unless great care is taken it looks dragged and hideous. Moreover, half the braid said to be pillow-made, on examination turns out to be machine-made; and I would advise a careful look to be given to the *border* of the braids before they are bought. No machine-made braid will have that little free loop of thread left standing beyond the width of the tape, but has a twisted (straight) outer thread nearly always. When once the difference is understood by comparison, you should never be deceived.

When, however, the braid is carefully and somewhat

heavily made, and with casual holes and irregularities, which pillow-workers will sometimes undertake to make as they proceed, it becomes an invaluable aid to the making of braid lace; and it must be remembered that where a certain amount of personal attention and interest can be devoted to the making of the braid, a far greater success will be insured afterwards in the production of the lace than if the common pillow-braid were used. Above all machine-made braid must be avoided, as altogether unsuitable. Pillow-made tape or braid, though often almost rivalling machinery in regularity, is much to be preferred, and some pains should be bestowed on the pattern. For work which, if properly done, will last for many years, and which may perhaps be handed down for many generations by loving hands, is surely worth bestowing some trouble upon at first.

In guiding the choice of a design, the one point I wish most to impress is, that any merely braiding pattern should not be tolerated as a foundation for a good imitation of old braid lace, though when fairly worked it may in itself have a very pretty effect.

Quite enough has now been said on the subject of this particular style of lace, as I do not intend to go into details and descriptions of the many beautiful and intricate stitches which have been so well described and taught by Mdlle. Riego and others, whose lace books I would recommend to all those who are fond of this braid lace. There are, however, many other kinds of lace which are quite as beautiful and easy of imitation, or rather of *reproduction*, as the so-called "Point Lace,"—requiring only more patience and care, because the process is certainly slower and the quantity produced much smaller in the end. But the simple fact of more

time and attention—and if possible of originating thought—having been bestowed upon any work, that work, in my opinion, becomes more valuable, and more worthy to be called a work of art, in days when people have become so economical of time that few think of making any great outlay of so valuable a thing upon mere fancy work. And the greater number therefore prefer to employ their spare moments on some work which will grow rapidly under their fingers, and in a short time produce the greatest quantity of result.

Now, *quantity*, certainly, has its own value, which every kind maker of smaller edgings and trimmings for children's frocks and pinafores can fully appreciate; but the accumulated gift of spare half-hours (not necessarily to the exclusion of more rapid work) upon some really beautiful piece of work will amply reward the care and patience bestowed upon it.

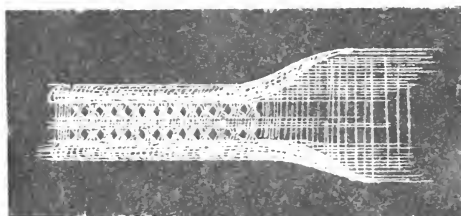
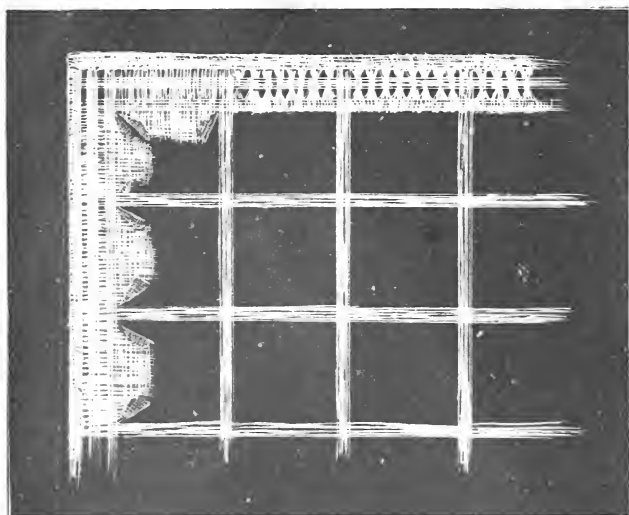
Some years ago a very pretty piece of Corfu lace, curiously worked in lozenges upon coarse linen, was lent to me, and I admired it so much that I was seized with the desire to discover the process by which it was made. My first attempts at imitation, I need hardly say, were simply hideous; but having my attention fairly drawn to it, I greedily accepted the loan of every piece of Greek lace offered to me; and then I made such progress in the art that my former braid lace or "lacet-work," seemed quite a poor art in comparison, and since then "point lace," and this particular Greek lace, has alone been my pride; for I believe that there are a few little secrets of the art, which, having learnt from the real lace itself, I have mastered perhaps better than others—at least as far as practice goes. Among them, for instance, are those cunning little knots, which add such richness to the bars in the braid lace, and are of such frequent occurrence in Greek

laces, that I could not rest satisfied with the "recipe" for them given by Mdlle. Riego; indeed, the perfect form and stiffness of the knobs in the laces before me, were quite unattainable by the old method. Many a trial I made, and many a piece of some patient nun's work did I ruthlessly unpick, in order to discover her secret, before I succeeded, and now these very little knots are the beauty of my work, and after all not very difficult to make. The secret must, however, wait until the proper time and place has come before it is divulged; and we will now take up a piece of lace and begin to imitate it from the beginning.

At the first glance, Greek lace appears to be made without any foundation, and almost as if all the parts were done *at once*, and therefore only to be done with the greatest difficulty. But a little patience and examination will soon be well repaid, and the tiny little squares of woven linen, consisting sometimes of only four or five threads of warp and woof, which will be discovered after a little search, betray the secret of the groundwork at once.

The first process of making this lace was a most tedious and monotonous task, and consisted in drawing out certain threads from the coarse linen which was to form the foundation for the needlework afterwards.

Let us now endeavour to make a small square of lace, such as will be seen drawn on the next page. This was drawn from a piece sold by Helbronner some years ago, and which struck me as so like a piece drawn in Mrs. Bury Palliser's delightful "History of Lace" that it deserves a place here, and will serve us now as a very good example of the lace we are speaking of. We would begin by taking a piece of coarse linen, somewhat larger than the square to be worked. The



border is made by drawing out three or four threads in such a manner as to mark out the square, and then finishing the edge by rolling it firmly, and hem-stitching it neatly and regularly down with rather coarse linen thread, beginning at the left-hand corner, and working on the wrong side, or that on which the rolling will be seen. This figure will now represent the appearance of the border. The next thing to be done, is to draw out three or four threads a little below and in the same direction, and hem-stitching over the little strip of linen thus left in the centre of the two sets of perpendicular threads. This will be more easily understood if a piece of linen, a needle and thread, be taken in hand at once, when, by being careful to begin at the left hand and working towards the right, the result is sure to be successful. See Figs. 3 and 4.

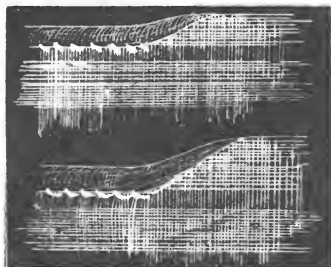


Fig. 3.

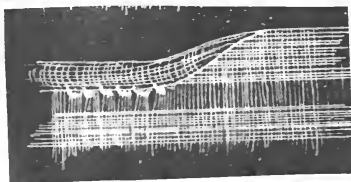
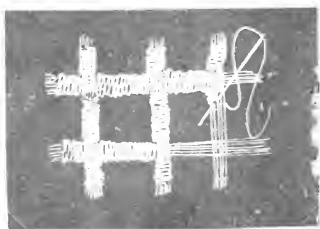
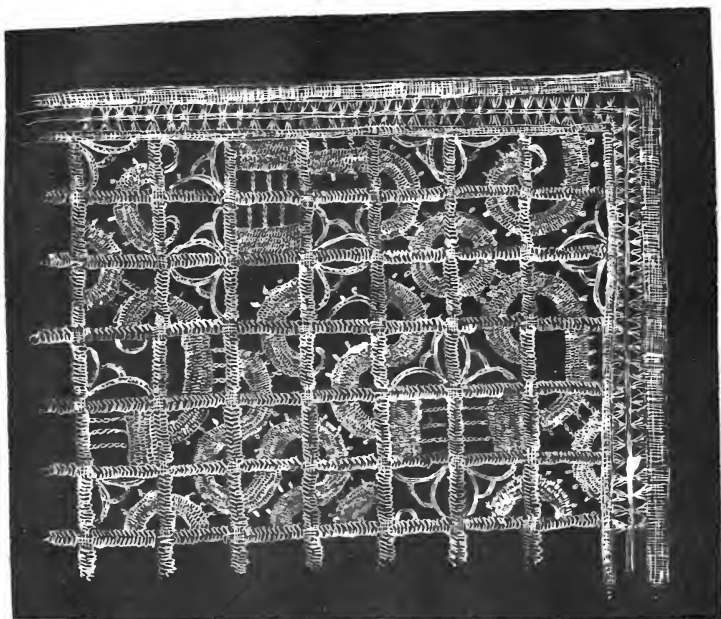


Fig. 4.

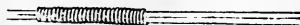
N.B.—These show the wrong side of the work.

Figs. 5 and 6 will explain at once the next steps to be taken, and the manner in which to proceed. Great care must be taken to use very sharp scissors when cutting away the linen, and on no account to cut more than is intended, as severing even one thread of the foundation, to be



left after the others are withdrawn, will often prove a serious trouble when the "Cluny" stitch has to be done. This use of the scissors has given the name of "point coupé" to some laces done on linen, but many of the real "point coupé" designs were more flowing in their lines than these Greek laces.

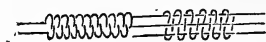
The principal foundations being now fairly established, we shall find that in many patterns diagonal supports are also needed. These diagonal lines may be thrown across with the needle; two or three threads (according to the place where you wish to end) will generally be found sufficient to begin with. After these threads have been thrown across, they must be covered by carefully working over and over them, taking pains that only the thread in the needle is allowed to bend, and not the foundation threads. If the foundation threads twist at all, the result is like a rope, in which all the strands are equally twisted; (this has a good effect sometimes, and may of course be occasionally used) but if the inner threads are kept firm, the whole when finished should present this appearance:—



The work is now fairly begun and ready for the further addition of *stitching* and patterns, which are often very symmetrical if carefully examined, although at first sight they appear very irregular and complicated. This irregularity, which is one of the beauties of the Greek laces we are now studying, arises more from the different *tension* (if we may use the phrase so familiar to the workers of a sewing machine) given to the foundation threads, by which means they are more or less easily drawn aside by the work afterwards

depending upon them—and this is far more the cause of variety than any great richness in the design itself. A very stiff and *empty*-looking pattern on the working paper, need not, of necessity, when worked, produce a stiff and formal piece of lace. Thus a clever and ingenious worker, by no very great trouble, may easily succeed in producing a prettily curious and varied effect out of a simple and even formally geometrical design.

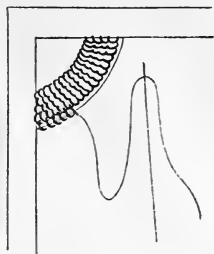
We now come to the stitches which were used to form the more solid parts of the work. And here a very few lessons will teach all that is necessary, for in this kind of lace there is not that endless variety of stitches which one is but too apt to indulge in, when working braid lace. Even there the variety is a mistake; two or three should be used at the most in one piece, and the effect is far more correct than where a dozen are introduced. But to return to our Greek lace. The chief way of filling up any shape desired in this lace was to add line upon line of that stitch which is commonly known as button-hole stitch, and, in French embroidery terms, “*feston*”; the “*point d’échelle*,” or ladder stitch, was used with it, and then a stitch which, being one of the principal stitches of Cluny lace, we will now call “*Cluny*” stitch, sometimes done on two, sometimes on three, foundation threads:—



And then little knots which form a sort of fringe to the solid parts, and are sometimes very thickly put together.

Suppose that we wished to make a solid band in a corner, thus—We would begin by throwing across from *left to right and back again* a foundation thread, which for the first row should always be double. Now *feston* a row of stitches until

you have covered your foundation ; but be careful not to put your stitches too close together, though the number must not be stinted. Then throw back another single thread, so as to make a foundation for the next row, and also to enable you to begin again at the left hand. Now



work one stitch into each of the last row, and cover the new foundation till you again reach the right-hand end of the work. This you repeat until you have formed a band deep enough for your purpose, and then you will probably wish to finish with a few knots. But it does not always happen that you have each a convenient border or corner in which to fix your work, and often an awkward piece must be done "*en l'air*," so to speak. By the same process of always throwing back a new foundation thread for every row, and carefully considering where to fix this thread in the last row, and where to end each feston row, you will soon learn to make any shaped piece and increase or diminish the length of your row at pleasure ; and then, when the piece is very large and oddly shaped, you would, as you went on, fasten it down to your leather or parchment with silk very firmly, to keep it well in its position and shape until the real supporting bars can be fastened. In some of the less geometrical laces this system of tacking down as the work proceeds is very important, and you will often have to tack down very finely the first outline of the piece to be worked, which, though merely one stout thread, still in fact forms the only foundation of the whole work—as you fill in the spaces thus outlined and join them with supporting bars afterwards. But this is slightly diverging from our simpler Greek lace, to which we must now return.

We have now come to the little knobs. When firmly and neatly executed these little additions are wonderfully successful, far more so than the loose round knots or knobs of button-hole stitch which are generally taught by the samples in the "begun pieces of work." You cannot use too fine



thread for these, as they were added on an extra fine row of feston after the rest was done, even where the rest of the lace was not so *very* fine. You begin a row just as you did the last feston row of your band, by a right to left foundation thread; then three or four feston stitches; then one

more stitch, but instead of drawing it up close, place the left-hand thumb on the left-hand thread of the loop, and hold it very firmly down upon the pattern, while with the right hand make the *needle* twist the thread of the other side of the loop six times (or eight, if the thread be very fine) round itself, *i.e.* the needle. Now place the needle, and coiled thread round it, under the left-hand thumb and draw up the thread *A* until both coil and needle are brought close up to the last row of feston, and then the whole of your work so far remains concealed and firmly held under your thumb against your first finger on the other side of the work. Be very careful not to twist your thread too tightly round your needle, or you will now find some difficulty in this next step. Take hold of the point of the needle, and draw it with the thread in the eye right through your six or eight coils, but beware of moving your left-hand thumb the while; keep a firm hold

all the time, so that the coil does not become displaced or entangled in itself. There may be a few troublesome knotty pieces of thread (especially if it be a long one) which will almost baffle your attempts to draw them through your twist. But you must steadily manage to undo them, and pull the whole length of your thread through without disturbing the roll under your thumb. You may now raise it, and the result should present the appearance of this figure.



If, on the contrary, one little knot gets down between your finger and thumb, the knot is lost, and must be started again.

You will see that now the thread has taken the place of the needle, and as soon as you take it with your right hand you will see that the thread B (the other side of your original loop) will at once begin to make a reverse coil round the first one, and this is precisely what we want.

Now begin very gently to pull up the thread A with your right hand, and encourage the outer coil of B by pushing or rubbing it with your left thumb from left to right while the coil lies upon it, until, by dint of these two contrary twists and the gradual shortening of the thread A, a regular little pillar of rope ending in a single thread, which comes out of its centre (and will soon be hidden away), is



produced, like that seen on the right hand of the last figure. Now make one more feston stitch *in the same stitch as the last*; with your needle place the outstanding thread well at the back of the knot, and leave a little neat firm pillar standing out quite independently from your work, having only at the back one single thread from the top to the work. The chief point to attend to, is the double twisting in *contrary directions*, which uses up all the thread, and without which you would have *two* untwisted threads at the back, and this, besides being unsightly and unnecessary, makes a weak knob.

When you have succeeded in making these knobs or thorns well, and the Cluny stitch and the diagonal foundation cords, and two equally twisted threads for lighter bars (*point d'échelle* is a variety of this kind), you have learnt enough to enable you to do any pattern; needing only the aid of a little ingenuity and practice to show you which foundations to throw across first, and where it is needful to tack down the work. This you may do very freely as there is not much chance of the work being so exact as not to have a little more tension here and there, which will, when unmounted, take off any too great formality.

In some old samplers I have seen only the outer border was of linen, and then they threw across the whole of the foundation lines, and the *Cluny* stitch should be used for such cords as were to represent the threads of the linen, the coiled ones being used for the diagonal lines. This is not, however, to be looked upon as a rule, as the Cluny stitch can be used in any direction with good effect, but it must be borne in mind that you are supposed to be working on drawn linen. Some of the cyanotypes at the end of this handbook, marked

old samplers, and which are photographed from the work itself, were worked in this way; but when a really careful piece was undertaken, they would not condescend to such a rapid way of proceeding. Some laces were done on the finest cambric linen drawn in the same manner and cut away.

There only remains now to be described the way of finishing off the edges for either insertions or larger pieces of work. In Mrs. Bury Palliser's "History of Lace" before referred to, there are given a few exquisite specimens of what are called *petites dentelles*, which would give a charming finish to an insertion or edge; but even simpler border laces have a good effect, and are by no means difficult of execution, and provided they are rather tightly and firmly done, they will preserve their form and position very well, and are quite worth adding.

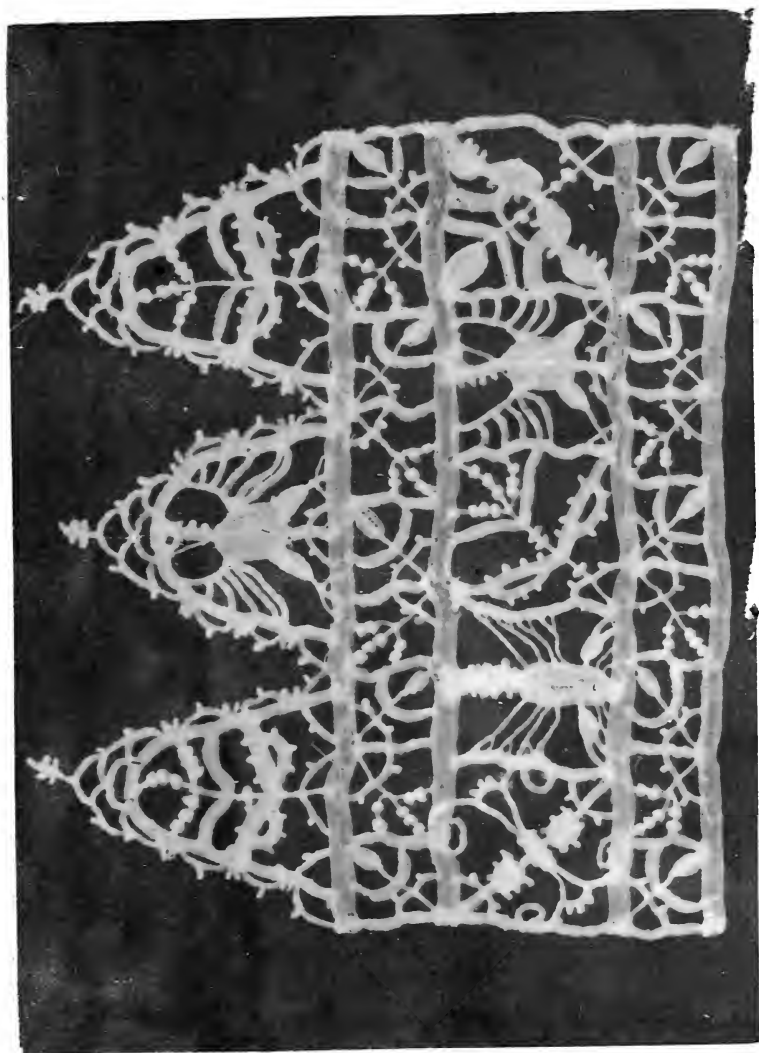
The drawings to be found at the end are all very simple and may be easily worked; and many pretty handkerchief borders, or edges and squares to be alternated with other squares of plain hem-stitched linen, may be arranged from them. The design to be drawn on cloth or leather as for braid lace, and the work freely tacked down to it as you proceed. This kind of work requires rather a stiffer support under the pattern than braid work, and much care must be taken not to pucker the pattern when either working or tacking down.

There is a kind of transparent calico, called at any stationer's "tracing cloth," upon which the pattern may be drawn with ink; and as this has a certain stiffness in itself, any leather put below, with a piece of coloured stuff between the two to show off your work, will then be quite strong enough.

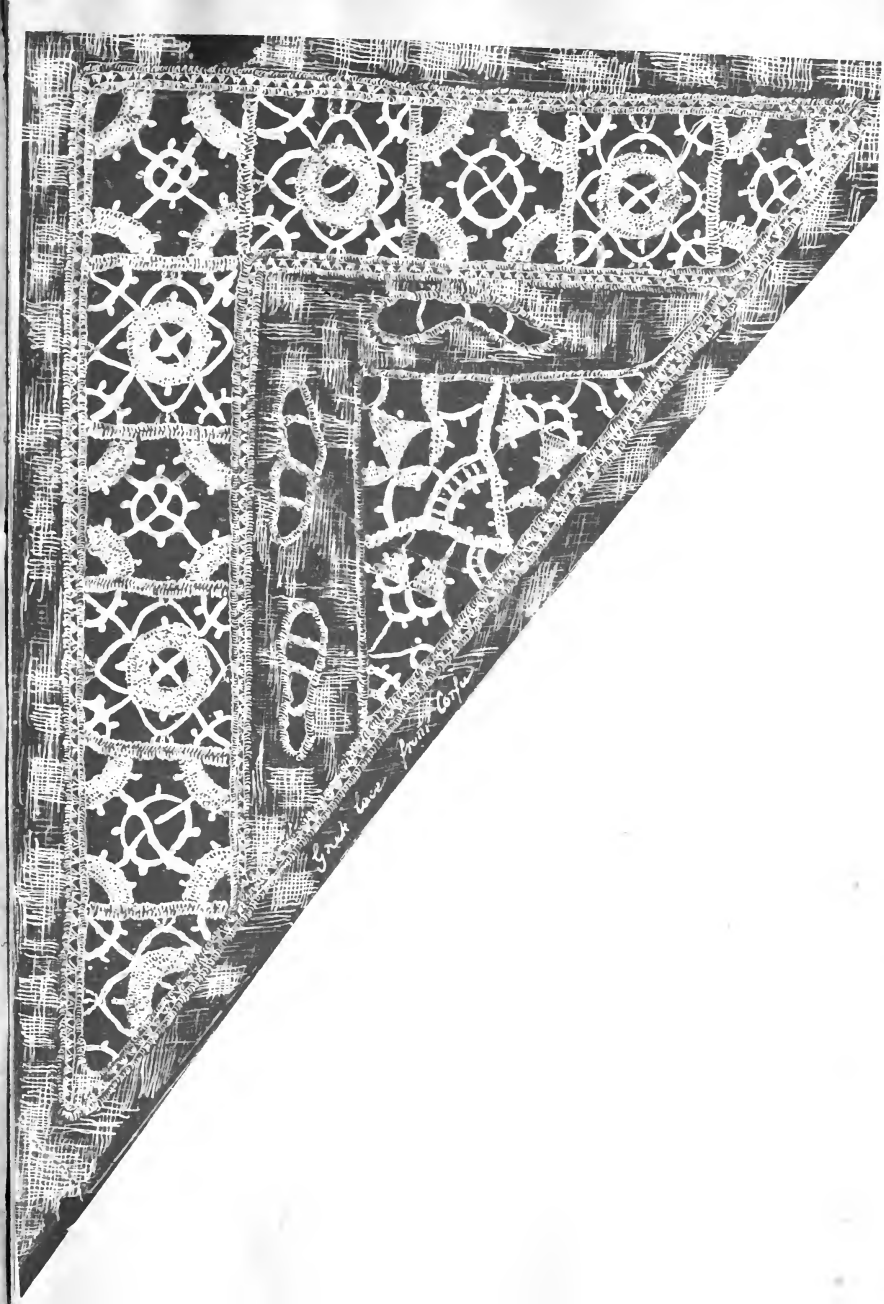
Having now given a description of the manner of working

Greek lace, I hope these few instructions, with the help of needle and thread and a piece of linen, will prove clear enough to explain any little difficulty there may be in the art, and that the specimens at the end may induce many to imitate them and reproduce them.

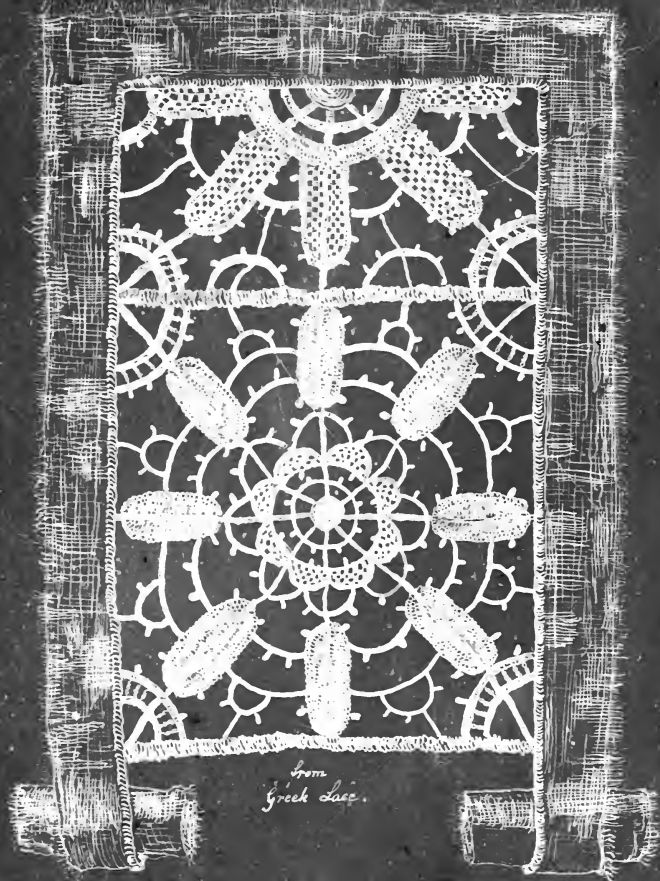
Since the publication of the first edition of this manual many ladies have begun this style of work; and having invariably been pleased with the effect, and also finding these instructions sufficient to work by, I feel confident that a fresh edition will meet with equal success, and that the more this kind of lace-work is known, the more it will be admired, and the more it will be reproduced.





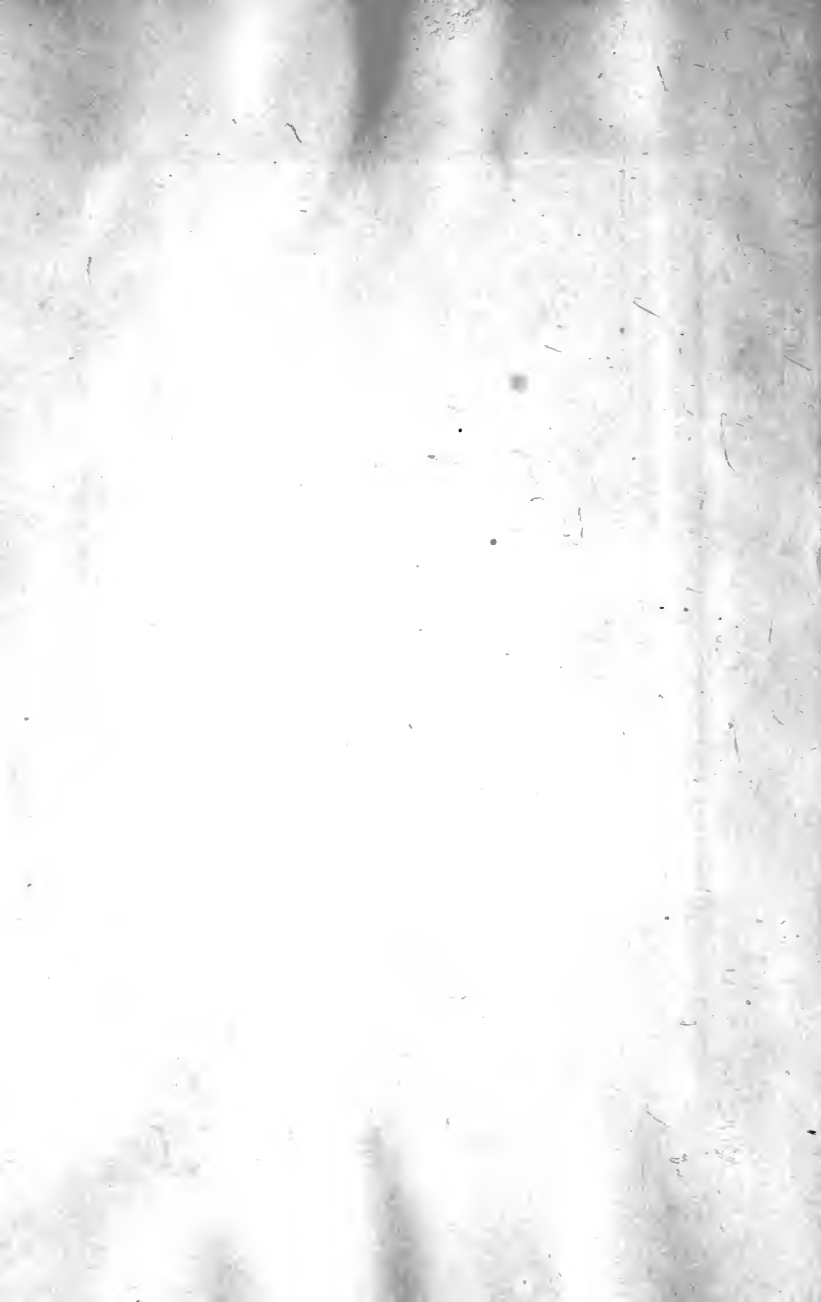


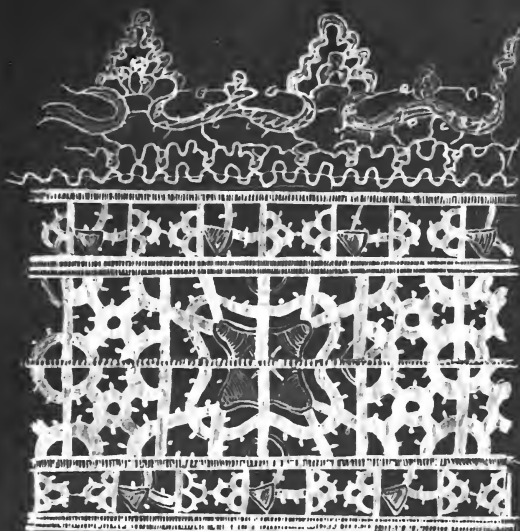




from
Greek Lace.

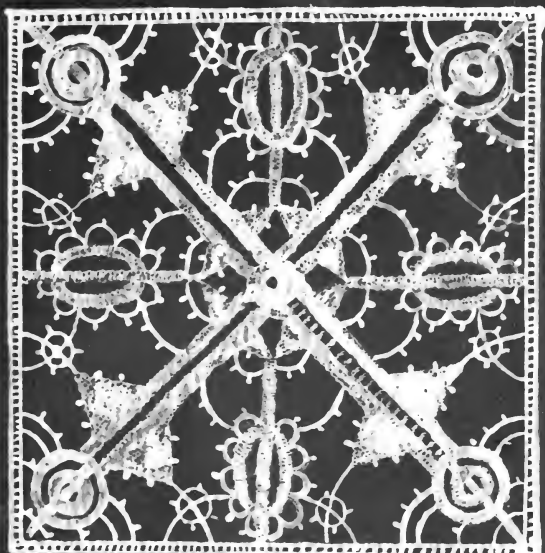






*Good Luck from Zante.
Given from Mr. Dury Bell's History of Zante*





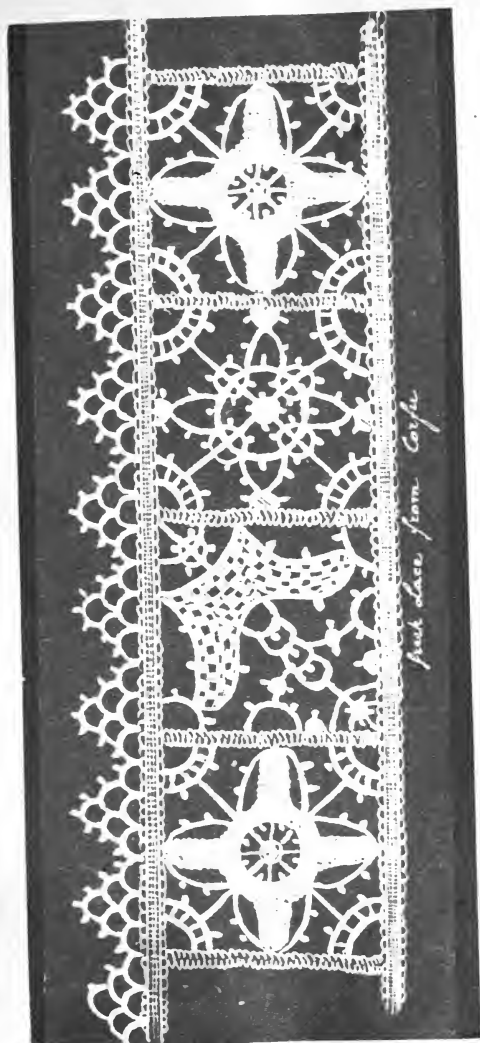
arranged from Greek lace

9.5

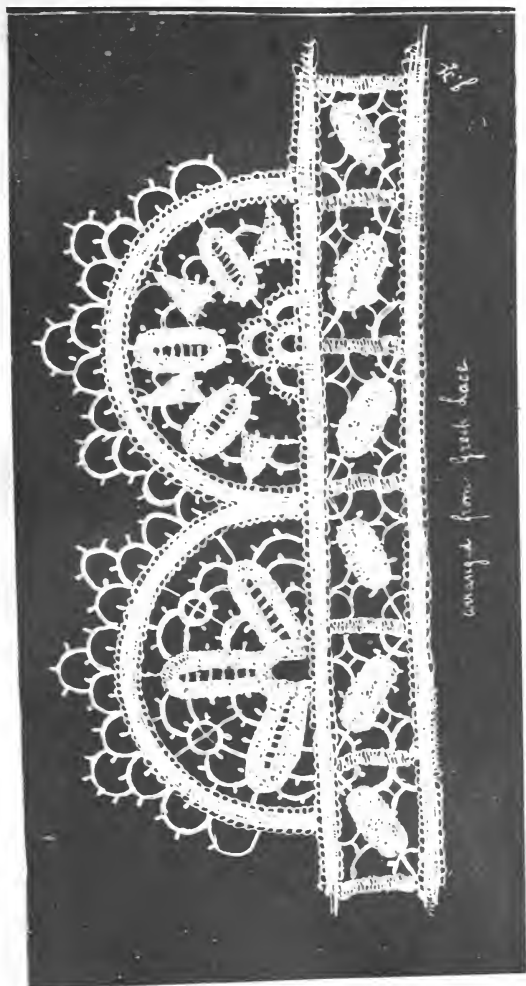


Petites Dentelles. Date 1557. Copied from M^{re} Burg Pallavicini's 'History of Lace'

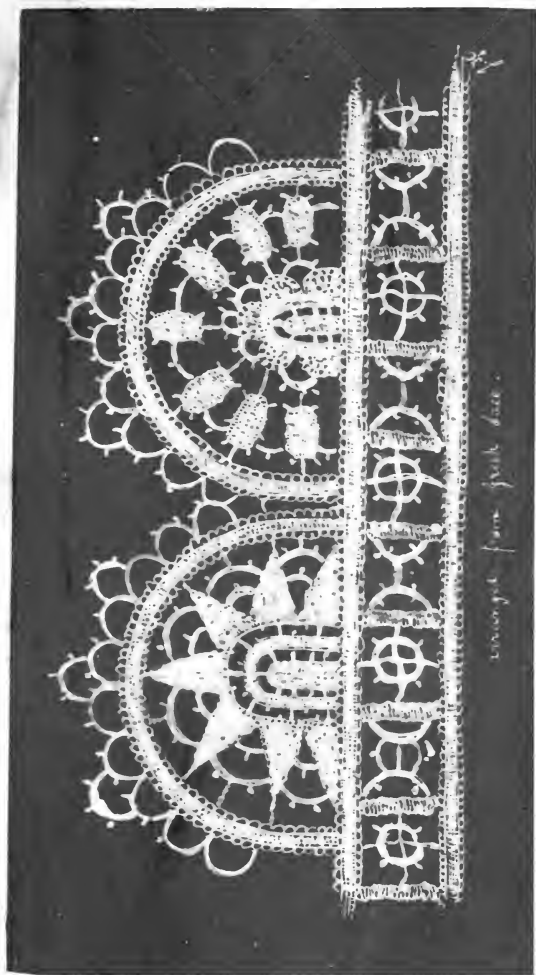


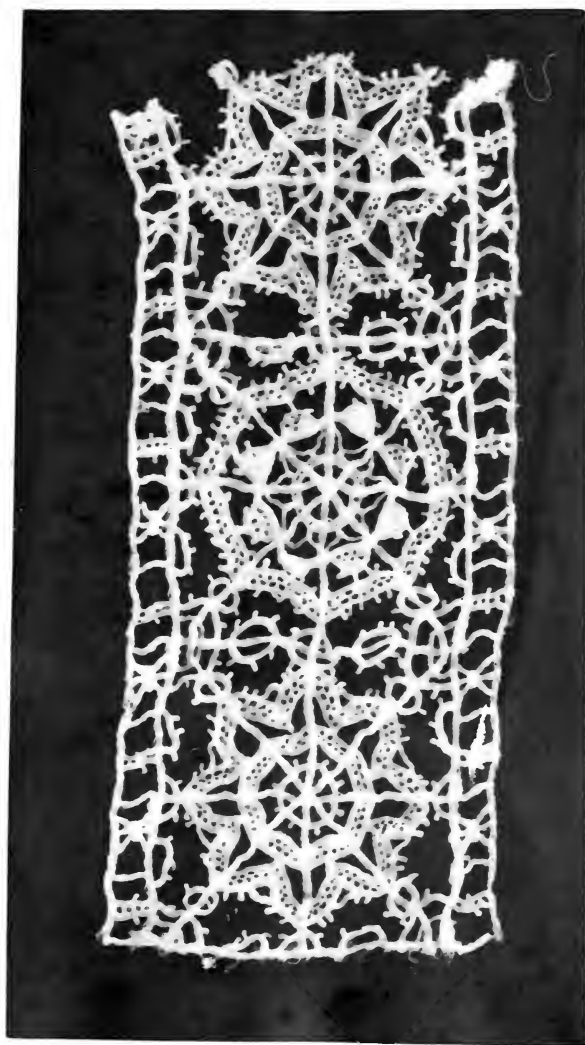




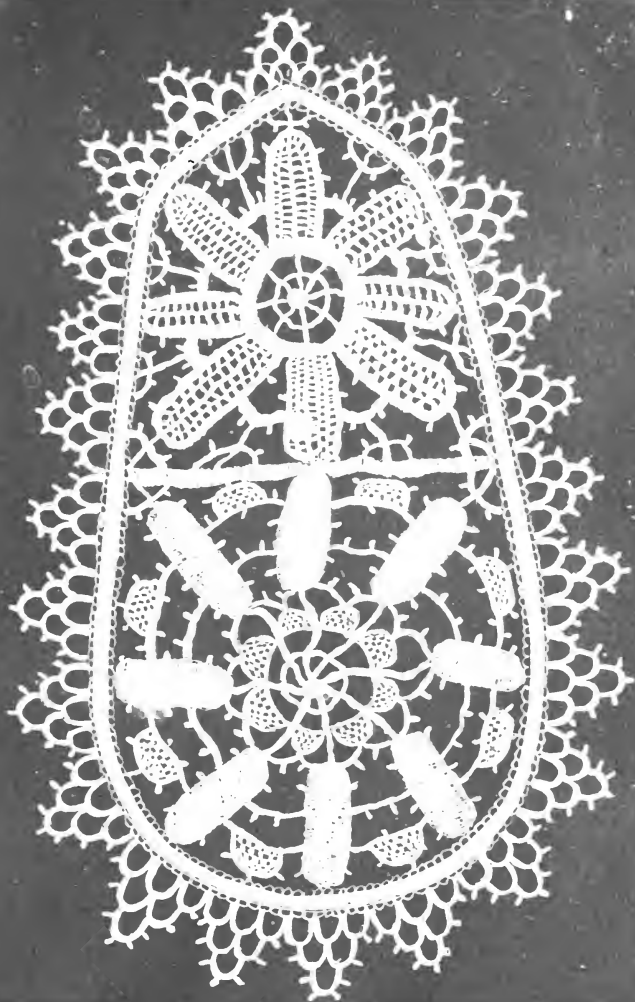


sample from fresh lace



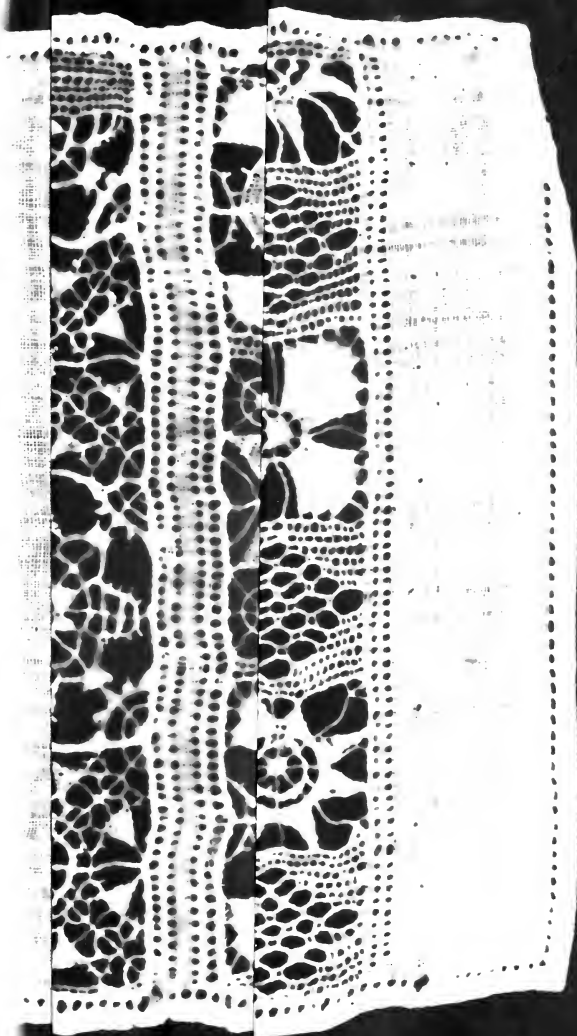


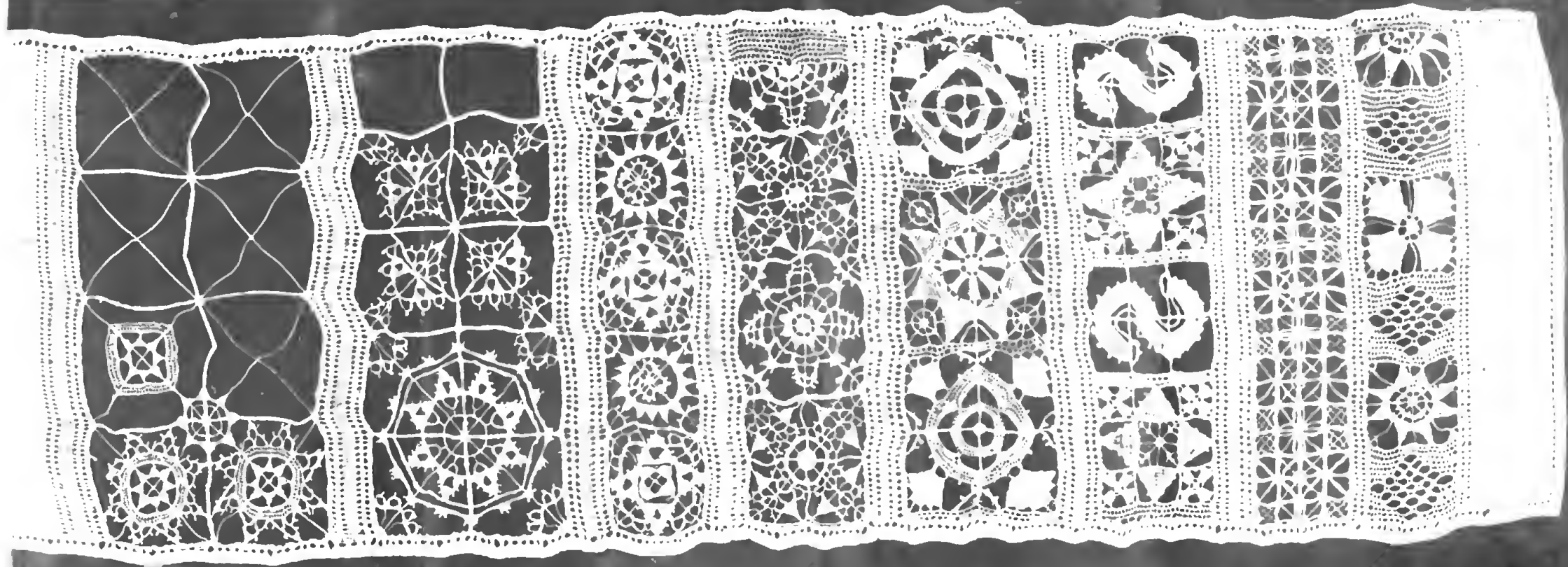


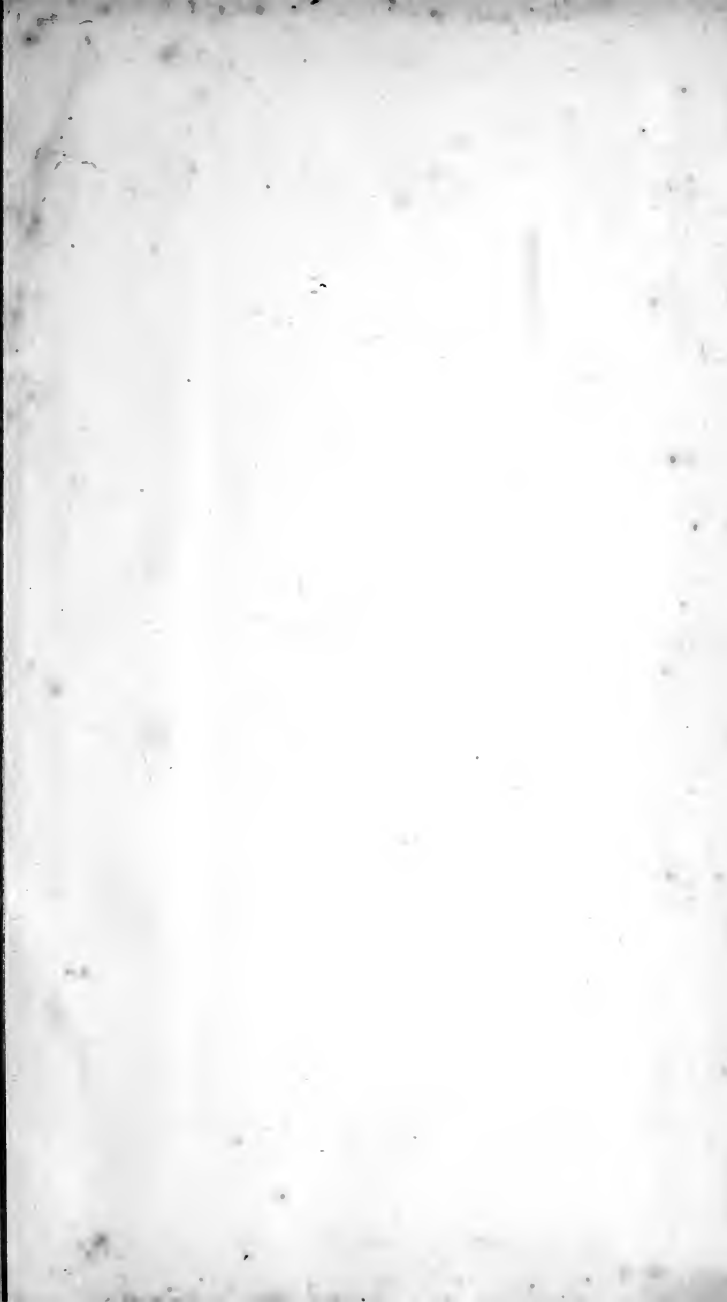




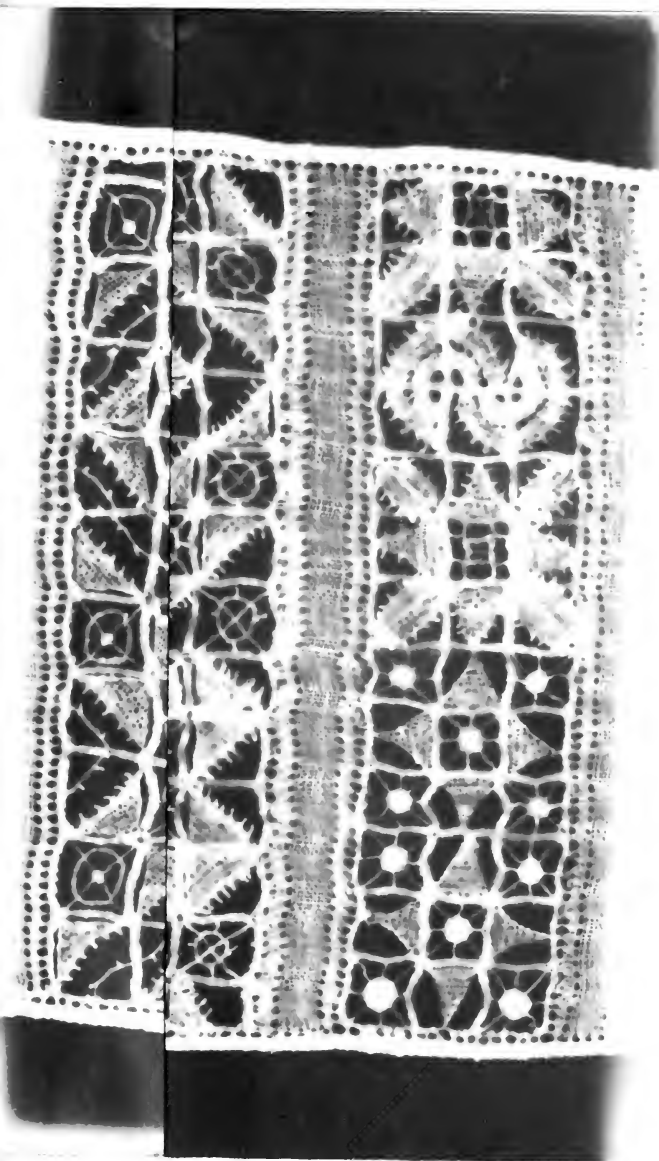


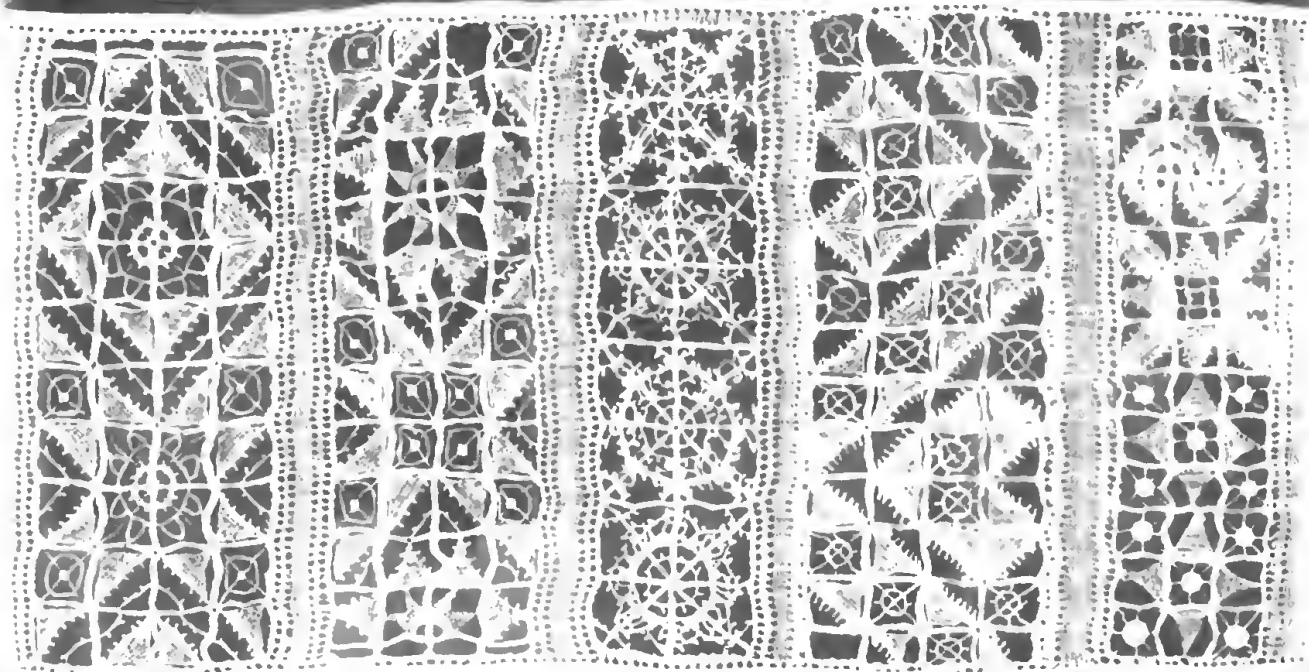














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